



Councilmember Tom Hucker, President
Councilmember Gabe Albornaz, Vice President
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Council President Hucker:

At the center of every CASA policy is the guiding principle that every person deserves dignity and respect, no matter where they're from, the color of their skin, or the money in their pocket. We fight for robust progressive policies that bring CASA members and the immigrant community at large closer to ending inequity. Our team leads and contributes to powerful campaigns on the local, state, and federal levels to build power in vulnerable communities and create a society where all community members can succeed; that's why, we carefully read and analyzed the Montgomery County Planning Board's Thrive 2050 - an update to the County's general plan that has been in the works since 2018. It is a policy document that addresses the vision for the County's future. The document addresses issues CASA members care deeply about: from affordable housing, to access to transit, environmental justice and economic opportunities.

The General Plan is a policy document that embraces our values and we hope for a future. This is not a zoning text, but a long-range guide for what planners should be considering as the county continues to evolve within the next 30 years. In fact, the second page of the document states that "none of the plan's zoning-related recommendations can be implemented without a sectional map amendment, district map amendment or a zoning text amendment approved by the County Council."

For more than 30 years, CASA has been heavily involved in master plan processes in Montgomery County as well as in other jurisdictions such as Prince George's County, Baltimore City and Alexandria, Virginia. We are indeed very familiar with planning processes and how they can affect immigrant and low-income communities. That's why, we recognize that Thrive Montgomery is a much-needed updated planning guide for our County; one that recognizes the need of advocating for policies towards racial and economic equity. In this critical time, we ask the Montgomery County Council to take leadership and move our county forward by voting in favor of Thrive 2050.



At CASA, we carefully read the recommendations provided in the “Affordable and Attainable Housing: More of Everything” chapter (pages 87-110) and the “Transportation and Communication Networks: Connecting People, Places and Ideas” (pages 75-86).

Some of the highlights from both sections that matter to our over 120,000 CASA members:

HOUSING

- Increase the number of income-restricted affordable housing units, especially for low-income households.
- As part of the commitment to the Housing First approach, develop strategies to build deeply affordable housing and provide permanent supportive housing.
- Prioritize use of public land for co-location of housing and other uses, particularly where government agencies design new facilities or dispose of real property.
- Calibrate the applicability of the MPDU program and other affordable housing programs to provide price-regulated units appropriate for income levels ranging from deeply affordable to workforce.
- Develop targeted strategies to minimize gentrification and displacement while promoting integration and avoiding the concentration of poverty.
- Expand existing programs designated to increase access to homeownership, especially among low-income residents, people of color and young adults; create new programs and tools such as community land trusts to maintain long term affordable homeownership opportunities.
- Support creative housing options including single-room occupancy units, missing middle housing types such as tiny houses, cottages, duplexes, multiplexes, and small apartment buildings; shared housing, co-housing, ADUs, and social housing, and cooperative housing to help meet housing needs and diversity housing options.
- Improve collection of data on neighborhood change to monitor and address involuntary displacement, disinvestment and related phenomena.
- Encourage provisions of multi-bedroom units suitable for households with children in multifamily housing.
- Integrate people with disabilities, people transitioning from homelessness and older adults into attainable housing with appropriate amenities and services.



TRANSPORTATION

- Build a network of rail, bus rapid transit, and local bus infrastructure and services that make transit the fastest, most convenient and most reliable way to travel to centers of economic, social and educational activity and opportunity.
- Connect historically disadvantaged people and parts of the county to jobs, amenities, and services by prioritizing investments in increasing access to frequent and reliable all-day transit service.
- Focus investments in communications infrastructure and services to connect people and parts of the county that lack convenient access to jobs and educational opportunities.

Furthermore, as stated in page 107, “Preservation of natural-occurring and regulated existing affordable units will minimize gentrification and displacement as these communities see future investments in transit infrastructure, schools and amenities.” For CASA, this is critical.

As the county continues to evolve, CASA is committed to continue working as partners. We encourage the County Council to vote in favor of Thrive 2050 and continue making as many changes as they consider to ensure our low-income and immigrant communities continue to have the opportunity of living in the county they called home.

Respectfully -

Ashanti Martinez, Research & Policy Analyst